

## **Emmett City Councilmember shares experience of Community Review**

*The following is a first hand account of the Community Review process written by Emmett City Councilmember Kathi Agenbroad:*

In May of 2003, the City of Emmett, Gem County, and our Gem Team, G.E.D.A. (Gem Economic Development Association), hosted the Idaho Community Review's visiting team of 20 community development professionals. With the diminished fruit industry and most recently, the Boise Cascade Mill closure, the loss of Gem County's agricultural based economy made us a perfect candidate for the review team's perspectives.

During this intense time of transition, many challenges surround Emmett and Gem County. Three areas of concern among community leaders are infrastructure, land use and civic life.

In the two years since the review, Emmett and Gem County have made great strides in developing and implementing healthy community development strategies. Many of the successes were just getting started when a very positive transition occurred at the highest levels of management in both the City and County. The old guard was challenged and partially replaced at the polls and people who were forward thinking, willing to learn, and prepared to make unpopular decisions replaced those who resisted change and perpetuated miscommunication between city and county. G.E.D.A. has restructured to become the community hub for brainstorming and information sharing. There are 28 members who consistently attend these roundtable discussions. Building these relationships has resulted in increased communication and collaboration.

The most pressing challenge that has come before the city was that the waste treatment plant for the city was and had been in violation of State and Federal environmental standards. By late 2004, when the city was scheduled to have been in compliance, EPA recognized that nothing had been done. Through news articles and public hearings, the community was educated and with the knowledge that water and sewer rates would dramatically increase, they still approved the sewer bond with a 92% vote!

Highway 16 has been widened with passing lanes over a 15-mile stretch and the Governor's plan for a north/south highway may impact future development of 16, as well as the marketability of Gem County.

The Gem Island sports complex now has a bridge on the south side of the island and will soon reroute park goes down Main St., thus strengthening our economic development in the downtown core district. City and County are developing a master parks and pathways plan that will eventually connect the city center with outlying schools and recreational opportunities.

Attracting industry with living wage jobs is Shadow Butte Development Corporation's number one focus! Grant money was acquired to develop a light industrial park on property already owned by the County. There was collaboration with the City to connect to the City sewer system and the County commissioners then offered building sites at very favorable rates to companies that would create jobs at a livable wage scale. At this time, commitments for all available lots in phase one have been

received and commitments are currently being taken for phase two. Ground has been broken and the park is moving forward.

The community continues to review and revise our joint comprehensive plan, with approximately 150 citizen volunteers. Many are high school students seeking a piece of “ownership” in their community.

A newly formed Arts Commission has gallery space where they promote local artists and have plans to refurbish some of the murals on the old buildings in downtown.

The City and County continue to cooperate and collaborate on community issues. I believe that the combination of the review team’s recommendations and the positive leadership in the community have created a catalyst that will change the face of Emmett and Gem County forever! Enough can’t be said for the courage of all who have united to create each success that contributes to our community’s vision of life in Emmett and Gem County!